Canadian Human Resource Management at the Crossroads
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What is This?
In this review, we employ an organization theory framework for understanding Canadian human resource management. We first examine the environment surrounding organizations in which the HR function is performed, then the HR function itself, and finally the HR manager's values, beliefs and actions within this system. Many of the changes that are occurring in the management of human resources are due to the pressure the environment is exerting on business organizations—pressures which the HR specialist helps manage. Among the most significant changes that face HRM are the increases in the amount of government policy concerning HR and the amount of HR-related legislation. HR specialists have responded by encouraging their organizations to adopt new personnel practices, such as employment equity and TQM, and by increasing their own level of training and professionalization. As a consequence of handling these pressures, many practitioners surveyed maintained that human resource management now has a higher profile in their firms and a greater set of responsibilities. However, human resource management faces some tough challenges from the global and national economy. As a result, the HR function continues to be a primary target in downsizing efforts, and HR expertise has continued to move out of large firms into small, part-time consulting units or into the hands of other corporate managers with working HR knowledge.

'Canada is at the crossroads' is the conclusion of one of the most sweeping, independent reports on the Canadian economy, recently completed by Harvard's Michael Porter (1991). More specifically, 'in the crucial area of human resources', Porter (1991: 49) claims, 'Canada is facing tough challenges... The level of advanced skills in Canada—critical to sustaining and upgrading sources of competitive advantage for Canadian industry—is inadequate.' Like several other analysts of the Canadian scene (cf. Little, 1993; Economic Council of Canada, 1990), Porter has identified two important sources of change: entry into the global economy, and the centrality of human resource management in successful competition. Both require renewed study of HRM in Canada.

In this review we focus on the current state of human resource management in Canada and the changes it is undergoing. We employ an organization theory framework for understanding Canadian HR (Beer et al., 1984; Boxall, 1992; Moore & Jennings, 1992; Schuler, 1987). We first examine the environment surrounding organizations in which the HR function is performed, then the HR function itself, and finally the * Financial support from the Centre for International Business Studies, Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration, University of British Columbia, is gratefully acknowledged.
HR manager's values, beliefs and actions within this system. At each level of analysis we attempt to identify sources of change in the Canadian scene and their consequences for other components of the HR system. In particular, we ask to what degree are government initiatives and legislation becoming the focus for change in the HR system in Canada? And to what degree are HR specialists becoming proactive in handling change—either by increasing the role of the HR function in strategic decision-making or by increasing their expertise and professional standing?

**SOCIETAL LEVEL**

**Demand for Human Resources**

As was mentioned in the Porter report on Canada, the employment pattern across Canadian industry has been—and is projected to be—diverging. In the goods-producing category, for the 1981–88 period, only the construction industry showed any growth in employment. There were declines in employment in manufacturing, primary industries, and agriculture. On the other hand, in the service-producing industries including public administration, there was significant growth, except for transportation, utilities and communications, which posted slight declines. Projections to 1995 do not materially alter this picture (Dungan et al., 1986; Little, 1993).

Canada entered the 1990s in a major recession. There is an upward trend in the chronically high aggregate unemployment rate (the Canadian average unemployment rate in 1992 was 11.3%, compared to 7.6% in 1988). Long-term unemployment disparities have worsened. Additionally, the burden of unemployment has been distributed unevenly across different demographic groups. Some groups in our society incur disproportionately high levels of unemployment; e.g., older workers, those with relatively little formal education, and persons who involuntarily lose their jobs (Gera, 1991). Occupationally, groups of people with certain skills, particularly those in the higher skilled manufacturing trades and in engineering, have been in short supply. Industrial and regional imbalances have been produced by unstable factors such as fluctuating prices and the timing of several megaprojects.

**Supply of Human Resources**

The past twenty years have seen a steady increase in labour-force participation from around 58 percent in 1971 to a projected 68 percent in 1995 (Dungan, MacGregor, & Plourde, 1986). Moreover, female participation in the labour force has increased dramatically (from around 38% in 1971 to a projected 60% in 1995), while the rate for males has remained steady at about 76 percent. The participation of females has increased most in the 25–55 age group. Many in this age group are working mothers or are childless.

The median age of the working population is also increasing. The proportion of working youths (15–24 years) will decline from around 20 percent in 1990 to a projected low point of 16 percent of the labour force by 2021 (Foot, 1982). The net effect is that the number of part-time workers on a voluntary basis has increased at more than twice the rate of full-timers over the last decade and the practice of work-sharing...
has increased. Part-time workers tend to be concentrated in the trade (24% of all employees) and service (25% of all employees) industries.

The sources of Canada’s immigration have shifted markedly away from western Europe and the United States toward East Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and both Central and South America. The majority of immigrants arrive as young adults (between the ages of 20 and 39 years), and their average dependency ratio (the proportion under age 14 and 65 or over) is much lower than for native-born Canadians. More immigrants (78%) live in large urban areas than do native-born Canadians (47%), and more than a third of Canadian immigrants speak a first language other than French or English. A recent Economic Council study (*New Faces in the Crowd, 1991*) concludes that the economic performance of immigrants compares very favourably with that of similarly qualified native-born Canadians, that they adjust reasonably well to the labour market in a short time, and that they constitute a significant component in the labour pool. Nonetheless, this changing mix has the potential for intergroup conflict and prejudice.

**Government Human Resource Programs**

Because of these current changes in labour supply and demand, a critical concern for federal policy makers is: 1) to diagnose sources of imbalance, and 2) to design and implement effective remedial programs. This concern has been the central theme of major government task force reports released in the last ten years: 'Employment and Immigration Canada' (1981); also see Economic Council of Canada (1982); House of Commons (1982), volume 2 of the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada (1985), and several other conferences and special reports (cf. Gera, 1991).

To date, theories concerning the impact of labour-market policy have been unreliable for making cause-effect inferences. This has been used to justify the extensive empirical research undertaken by Canadian governmental bodies to assess the relative effectiveness and efficiency of various programs. Nevertheless, earlier efforts by the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC), the central commission generating government action, tended to focus more on temporary reduction of unemployment rather than on long-term creation of productive employment. Therefore, the CEIC has moved to modify its job strategy in three ways.

First, the CEIC has been attempting to develop an up-to-date, high-quality, labour-market intelligence system which would be linked to an integrated series of more consistent, better informed, better targeted, and better co-ordinated labour-market policies programs. Second, the Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS) has been developed to forecast both supply and demand by regions by taking into consideration such factors as regional shifts in the skill-mix of the workforce, inter-occupational mobility, substitution in response to changes in wages or supply conditions, modifications in participation rates, or changes in price and productivity (Kaliski, 1985). And third, Canadian Jobs Strategy (CJS) was brought into being in June 1985 as a major part of the CEIC’s Human Resource Development Programs (several earlier, short-term programs were allowed to diminish). The CJS is intended to support training programs or strategies which have public policy objectives, which are directed at specific target groups, and which are aimed at improving long-term employment prospects.
for individuals (Milkovich et al., 1988). Furthermore, CJS attempts to encourage the participation of regional and local governmental and private organizations, including unions, in joint ventures and initiatives.

**Human Resource Legislation**

In Canada, to a considerable extent, legal regulations shape human resource policies and constrain HRM practices (Sack & Lee, 1989). Less than 40 percent of the Canadian workforce is unionized, and not all aspects of the employee relationship are covered by collective agreements. Hence, employment legislation is designed to provide coverage and protection for all workers (McPhillips & England, 1989). However, Canada has a particular problem because its employment relations laws are established by thirteen separate jurisdictions made up of ten provinces, two territories, and the federal government. Federal labour and employment laws cover less than 10 percent of the labour force—basically, those employees of interprovincial and international firms whose operations cross provincial boundaries or constitute federally linked Crown corporations. Firms doing business in more than one province may encounter certain difficulties and confusions because each province and territory has separate human rights and labour standards laws and procedures for interpretation and enforcement. Therefore, compliance with legal requirements means maintaining specific records and creates much paperwork.

In addition, Canada’s new federal Constitution has a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter provides protection against discrimination concerning race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability. Because the Charter is relatively recent, some of its specific clauses are being tested in the courts, and interpretations under the Charter as it applies to employee rights and standards are prone to change.

At present, the content of HR legislation has been described by McPhillips & England (1989) as falling into four broad categories: work standards, individual contracts of employment, human rights, and occupational health and safety. Within each of these categories, specific statutes lay out the (often minimum) requirements, rights and duties. Most jurisdictions have legislation covering wage protection, minimum wage, hours of work and overtime, annual vacation, statutory holidays, maternity leave, and termination procedures. Employers, of course, are free to provide greater than minimum levels of specified benefits and management bargains to establish a collective agreement which specifies benefits far in excess of the statutory minima.

This human rights legislation applies to all employees—union and non-union. Both employers and unions are prohibited from discriminating against workers. In practice, an employee generally perceiving discrimination on the part of an employer will seek early redress through the formal grievance process rather than going to the human rights council in the jurisdiction. Nevertheless, McPhillips and England (1989) identify some significant problem areas: employees often are unaware of their rights; employees may fear employer reprisal; understaffed agencies often do not effectively police the laws; and legal remedies are often inadequate. The reality of protection is often far different from the ideal level intended.

In the future, Canadian human resource managers and their trade union counterparts
must work harder at creating a legislative framework that operates more effectively. Furthermore, in an atmosphere where the public has grown increasingly impatient with the inconvenience of strikes and slowdowns, and where tax increases and escalating goods and service costs have often been attributed to union demands, HR managers must try to break the old adversarial patterns between management and labor. Better ways must be found for eliciting union co-operation in joint efforts to improve Canadian union-management relations and labour cost effectiveness. In sum, it is imperative that HR managers fulfil an increasingly professionalized role in Canada's organizations.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

The HR Function

A major area of interest is how the role of the Canadian HR department has changed or grown in the last five years. Based on open-ended questions directed at a sample of over 400 Western Canadian HR practitioners, Moore and Robinson (1989) received a wide variety of responses, which were categorized into general areas. Consistent with the results discussed above, only 12 percent of the respondents felt their departments had not grown or changed. Approximately 25 percent made a general statement that a new HR department had developed or that their department had grown considerably. Most respondents were quite specific in attributing their department's development to its taking on greater responsibilities. As a result, their department was now more involved in decision-making and/or had a greater impact on the organization as a whole.

As shown in table 1, involvement in all areas seems to have increased—particularly in employee benefits, counselling, and compensation. If the overall perspective is accurate, then the level of tactical centrality in administering the HR function has increased dramatically over the past five years.

Canadian HR departments are also perceived to be involved in planning at the strategic level. Two-thirds to three-fourths of the respondents indicated that their departments participated to a large or very large extent in developing HR strategies, and in initiating and implementing HR programs, although less than 45 percent saw their departments as having strong involvement in planning at the corporate or overall level. Nevertheless, compared to the level of participation in strategic planning five years ago, the respondents perceived significantly greater (p<.05) involvement both in strategic decisions specifically focused on human resource issues and programs and in overall organization planning. The perceived extent of increased involvement at both the functional (HR) and the overall (corporate) levels of planning was about the same.

Even though the role played by the HR department in organizations was perceived by Western Canadian respondents to have grown and developed in recent years, 54 percent felt that the relative prestige of the department was best characterized as medium (although 32% chose 'high'). Perception of departmental prestige was significantly related to level in the hierarchy. HR practitioners occupying more senior positions had a greater tendency to perceive their department as having a higher level of prestige.
Table 1  HR departmental involvement in specific human resource decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision area</th>
<th>% reporting high/sole involvement</th>
<th>% increased involvement over past 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary separation</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource policy</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grievances</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract negotiation</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR planning</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance appraisal</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR research</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and development</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control/discipline</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary separation</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization review</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative action/EEO</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job design</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive payment</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time off/on work</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to Murray et al. (1990), measurement of the HR department’s impact and effectiveness remains mainly subjective. In 45 percent of their sample, no kind of HR evaluation was conducted. Where an evaluation occurred, it was typically a qualitative appraisal; it was made against a set of strategic departmental objectives in only about half of the departments. US- and Canadian-controlled firms operating in Canada were more likely to use quantitative forms of HR department evaluation than were European-controlled firms. Firms experiencing cutbacks, as opposed to growing firms, were more likely to use quantitative evaluation of their HR departments. Firms experiencing comparatively low growth were more likely to evaluate their HR activities against strategic plans. Thus, it appears that the more competitive or difficult the firm’s environment, the greater the likelihood that the HR function will be rigorously evaluated.

Not surprisingly, Murray et al. (1990) in their study found that the use of outside consultants is becoming more common, especially in rapidly evolving areas such as employee benefits, training, computerized HR information systems, and government regulations and legislation affecting labour relations. Interestingly, the more highly educated the HR specialists were, the more often consultants were used ($r=.32; p<.01$).
Recent Developments

A chronic need in Canada for improving employee effectiveness has fostered the adoption of promising techniques in job design, employee participation, communication, and conflict management (to name a few). Unfortunately, some of the new human relations ideas were prematurely or inappropriately packaged and promoted as ‘cure-alls’ in management development programs which became faddish during the past 20-year period (Campbell, 1971; Milkovich et al. 1988). In spite of these HR fads, encouraging gains have been made, and many companies have successfully carried out job redesign projects, cross-training of workers, quality of work-life programs, quality circle applications and innovations in workplace flexibility, often with gratifying co-operation from the unions (Chaykowski & Verma, 1992). These HR initiatives have not been uniform across Canadian industry (Saha, 1989).

The imperative for effective labour-management negotiations continues to be a prime concern of organizations in Canada, especially in the public service arena. Many foreign-owned firms with subsidiaries in Canada have decentralized their operations, allowing their Canadian HR managers more autonomy in strategic decision-making where peculiarly Canadian issues are concerned (Milkovich et al., 1988). Many organizations located in Canada's major metropolitan areas (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) are faced with the HR opportunities and problems inherent in an increasingly multicultural work force in a country which espouses the ideology of preserving cultural diversity—'a mosaic'—in contrast with the US ideology of cultural homogeneity—the 'melting pot' (Economic Council of Canada, 1991a). Prima-facie evidence of a tendency toward Canadianization of the HRM profession is provided by the proliferation of Canadian HR textbooks within the last ten years (e.g., Werther et al., 1988; Stone & Meltz, 1988; Milkovich et al., 1988; Dolan & Schuler, 1988; Anderson et al., 1989). Distinctive HR professional associations have developed regionally, although a national federation existed for several years prior to 1982.

The current form and scope of Canadian human resource management has been the focus of a relatively small number of recent research efforts (Kumar, 1980; Thacker & Cattaneo, 1987; Blake, 1988; Saunders & Leck, 1989; Moore & Robinson, 1989; Murray et al., 1990; Jennings & Moore, 1991; Jennings, 1992). At present, a comprehensive Canada-wide study of HR managers and management remains to be done. Nevertheless, extant research does provide some insight regarding several important questions about the management of HR inside of firms. It allows us to answer questions such as: What are the characteristics of those persons who are engaged in HRM? What role do HR managers perform? How is this role impacting on the organization? Has this role changed? To what extent is HRM a profession?

THE MANAGERIAL LEVEL

Human Resource Managers

In their study of western Canadian HR managers, Moore and Robinson (1989) found that 92 percent of HR practitioners were performing a managerial role at some level in their departments. Thus, the characteristics of this group can be used for a profile
of the HR managerial group as a whole, while the Murray, Whitehead and Blake study (1990) can be used for a profile of senior HR manager in large firms.

Moore and Robinson's respondent group was composed of 62 percent males and 38 percent females. The median age was 38 years with a range from age 21 to age 77. Male practitioners' salaries were significantly higher than those for females, and there was a positive relationship between managerial level and salary. Western Canadian HR managers are quite highly educated and many have specialized in the HR field. Moreover, compared to a Western Canadian study of HR managers (primarily located in the province of British Columbia) conducted 20 years ago (Moore and Longbottom, 1971), a much larger proportion of present-day managers have had specific training in the HR field (33% vs. 22% earlier) and the proportion obtaining university training in general has increased from 53 percent to 64 percent. Further, this comparison does not include the 17 percent in the present study who earned a diploma in one of the technical or community colleges not in existence in 1971.

In general, the respondents in the Moore and Robinson (1989) study were experienced managers who held fairly senior positions in the organizational hierarchy. About one-fourth reported directly to the president or chief executive officer (CEO) and 32 percent were two levels from the top. On average, these managers had been with their present organization for eight years and had spent six years in HRM with that firm. Overall, the managers had an average of 11.5 years' experience in the field (st. dev. = 7.0 years). About one-third of the managers held positions in government organizations and about two-thirds worked in organizations not engaged in primary industry. Nevertheless, in the average organization represented, 42 percent of the employees were union members.

Compared to the past, how do Canadian HR practitioners perceive themselves? Moore and Robinson (1989) probed the extent of agreement with several statements about HR people which were written for a Canadian study 30 years ago (Colmen et al., 1959). The statements and comparative percentage agreements are shown in table 2.

A visual examination of these comparative data provides a consistent impression that personnel or HR managers perceive themselves as more 'managerial' than in the past, but at the same time a greater percentage identifies a primary responsibility directed at employees rather than management. We interpret this seeming contradiction to reflect the current tendency of enlightened HR managers to recognize the plurality of their role. Specifically, HR managers can only enhance their strategic influence by establishing an effective linkage between top management and the employees, resulting in mutual understanding, co-operation, and overall effectiveness. In essence, these findings seem to indicate a gradual upgrading of the field rather than a dramatic gain or breakthrough in any one area of activity. Of course, these data only reflect the way HR managers view themselves. Managers representing other functional areas may hold differing views.

Murray, Whitehead and Blake (1990) report that, although 40 percent of the most senior HR managers have titles that do not contain the designation of vice-president, most senior HR managers do report directly to the CEO or the immediate second in command. In Canada's largest organizations, most HR functions maintain a corporate presence plus a dotted line (advisory) relationship to subsidiary HR units which are operational staff departments serving the line managers at that level. One important
Table 2 Canadian HR managers' self-perceptions: 1959 and 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1988</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors outside the personnel office view personnel as a nuisance, not an aid</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most personnel people keep up with recent developments in their field</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel people have provided vigorous leadership needed to support merit principles in such actions as selection and promotion</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel people stick together too much—speaking their own language and remaining aloof from those outside the field</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel people usually know more about the operating programs they service than line officials give them credit for</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few personnel people actually practise with their own staffs what they preach to operating officials</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most personnel people are prone to hide behind rules and regulations as an excuse for a lack of positive action</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most personnel programs have the respect of employees in the organization they serve</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The primary responsibility of the personnel office is to management rather than to employees</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


indicator of any manager's potential for having real impact on organizational strategy is how that manager is perceived by his or her CEO. The way the manager is seen to behave affects the way the CEO will interact with that person and his or her department. Murray and his colleagues found that the CEOs perceived their senior HR executives more as professional specialists than organizational generalists, although they were perceived as 'good' but not outstanding either as generalists or specialists.

In the Canadian organizations studied by Murray et al. (1990), corporate-level senior HR managers were very often used in a consulting (or advisory) role both on HR and on operational policy issues, with the effective decision-making authority more often in the hands of corporate-level senior line management. Once a policy decision is taken, however, the senior HR manager has much responsibility for implementation. Blake (1988) reported three factors which are important determinants of the amount of influence a senior HR executive (SHRE) has on corporate-level decision-making: support of the CEO, credibility, and acceptance by peers. The CEOs Blake interviewed overwhelmingly felt that their SHRE’s influence had increased in the past five years; however, the CEOs believed the SHREs must develop a more holistic understanding of business, as well as a ‘bottom line’ orientation.

In Canada, while it is not common for SHREs to move up to the CEO position, a good performance record and a generalist background can enable them to move higher in the organization outside the human resource function. Thus, to have real
organizational influence, the HR executive must strive to become both a professional HR specialist and a generalist in his or her organization's business arena.

HR Managers as Professionals

The struggle for professional recognition and for acceptance (clout) at the senior organizational level continues to characterize the Canadian human resource managers. One indication of increasing acceptance of HR management in Canada is the remarkable growth in numbers of HR managers from about 4,000 in 1971 to about 25,000 in 1981. Continued growth at a slower pace is projected for the 1990s (CEIC, 1986). Canada has approximately 30,000 HR managers and 35,000 HR officers in 1993. Some scholars have argued that, particularly during the past decade, the human resource function in Canada has grown increasingly distinct from HR management in the United States (Milkovich et al., 1988). There are several reasons for this view. Politically, there has been a resurgence in national feeling, centring around the 1982 Constitution and its accompanying human rights provisions—many of which have been or are being translated directly into employment regulations. Perhaps more importantly, Canada has not experienced a decline in unionization like the US.

To provide an indication of the extent to which Western Canadian HR managers see their field as a profession, Moore and Robinson (1989) identified several dimensions which have been used to characterize professional occupations (cf. Abrahamson, 1967; Kleingartner, 1969; Ritzer and Trice, 1969). The managers were asked how well each dimension described the HRM field. The responses were dichotomized into descriptive or not descriptive categories as shown in table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional dimension</th>
<th>Percent indicating descriptive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A body of specialized knowledge including standardized terminology</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widely recognized certification based on standardized terminology</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of ethics</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members oriented towards a service objective</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognized by the general public as a profession</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited access to the field, based on acquisition of standard skills/knowledge</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A professional society or association, which, among other things, represents and gives voice to the entire field</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners are licensed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Collegiality among practitioners</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Based on the pattern of responses in table 3, the professional dimensions most descriptive of HRM include a body of specialized knowledge and a membership oriented towards a service objective. Other dimensions are less descriptive, particularly with
regard to licence or certification requirements. Only 60 percent view their field as being publicly recognized as a distinct profession.

On the other hand, at least three-fourths of the respondents felt that improvement is needed on all dimensions except licensing and collegiality, and even in these two areas, over half the sample called for improvement (58% and 62% respectively). Clearly, there is much interest in becoming more professional as a field but not necessarily in securing formal recognition through licensing or certification arrangements. In common with many other Canadian professionals such as engineers, accountants, radiologists, and nurses, the *de facto* amount of professional status is much more dependent on his or her demonstrated competence at work day after day than on paper qualifications. Nonetheless, the Human Resource Professionals Association of Ontario sponsors a professional designation program which is enshrined in legislation in the province of Ontario. Designation as a Certified Human Resource Professional is granted based on satisfaction of certain standards of educational background and/or experience as an HR practitioner. The province of Alberta also grants the CHRP designation, although there is no legislative status involved. All other provinces are considering some form of professional designation as well, although a Canada-wide certification program leading to professional designation is not in place at present (Argue, 1993).

Moore and Robinson's (1989) survey contained one question regarding the steps the respondent had taken to upgrade professionally during the last two years. In general, HR practitioners in Western Canada put considerable effort into continually improving themselves. Only 3 percent left the item vacant and most respondents could list at least two activities. The most common activity was attendance at HR-related seminars, courses and workshops. Three-fourths of the sample had been involved in such programs. Commonly mentioned courses included computer training, association-sponsored seminars, and courses offered by local colleges or universities. Another major activity for about 25 percent of the respondents was reading career-related literature from periodicals to recent legislative changes. As indicated earlier, most of these respondents are well trained, and they clearly have a strong desire to stay current in their field. Other less frequently mentioned upgrading activities included participation in HRM associations, networking, attending conferences, and participation in certificate or diploma programs (where they exist).

Similarly, at senior level, Murray et al. (1990) found HR managers keeping up with their field by attending conferences and reading both the professional HR literature and business periodicals, especially those regarding the environment in which their company operates. Murray and his colleagues found that 75 percent of the SRHMs had careers entirely in HR, but they typically had moved from one company to another, increasing their authority and responsibility with each move.

In the Canadian context, professionalization appears to be worthwhile for a career-oriented HR manager. Jennings and Moore (1990) found that increasing job complexity and education were associated with increased salary and autonomy. Increased interdepartmental contact (a more effective internal network) and increased involvement in strategic decision-making lead to more salary, autonomy, and satisfaction. Working in an HR department with a legitimated (formally recognized) ideology (policy
orientation with integrated practices) yields more rewards than working in a department without a legitimated ideology. In Canada, organizational size is related to professionalization of the HR function. Because the body of HR knowledge is expanding and becoming more complex, there are more sophisticated tools with which to manage, hence more interest in using these effectively. There is a pervasive feeling that the real professional challenges in the next decade lie in integrating HRM theory and practices with overall organization strategies (cf. Blake, 1988; Mahoney and Deckop, 1986; Murray et al., 1990; Werther et al., 1990).

THE FUTURE FOR CANADIAN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

According to Moore and Robinson (1989), practitioners see a similar set of environmental factors influencing HRM's development in the next five years as in the last five. More than two-thirds of the Western Canadian practitioners felt that changes in government legislation will have a significant impact on the field in the near future. Almost half of the respondents felt that equity legislation would have a considerable impact, and nearly an eighth mentioned government-related issues specifically surrounding human rights and the Charter of Rights in the new Canadian Constitution. Other factors mentioned by at least one-fourth of the sample included changes in work structure, including part-time work and early retirement, changes in provincial labour laws, benefits and compensation issues such as the rising cost of benefits, pension reforms and the need for flexibility, and the HR impact from technological change and computerization.

Given the similarities of these future trends to those of the past, it is likely that the responses of the HR function and HR managers will continue to be similar to those in the past. The HR function will have an increased involvement in strategic decision-making, particularly in the area of employment equity and developing methods to incorporate aboriginal peoples into the mainstream of the Canadian workforce. HR managers will continue to improve their training and professional standing. For instance, the Human Resource Management Association (HRMA) of British Columbia is presently considering a certification procedure for its members, which would involve four elements: 1) committee evaluation of current knowledge, 2) standardized course work, 3) a period of practical service, and 4) some type of formal examination (Argue, 1993).

However, we believe that HR specialists still need to acknowledge that 'Canada is at a crossroads', and not facing simply the same set of pressures as in the past. The need for advanced training and for flexibility in the workforce will increase the volatility of employment and careers. International competition will exert enormous cost-cutting pressures on firms, which experience shows will be transmitted directly to the HR function. Unlike the past, the real expertise in HRM may end up residing not in large HR departments, but in small, external, part-time consulting firms that specialize in training, legal issues and pay systems, and in other managers in the firm who have added HR knowledge to their repertoire of skills. We do not eschew this outcome, but we do note that in this scenario, the environment still appears to be dictating the form and function of HRM. HR practitioners as a group need to be less reactive, more proactive. In particular, synergies across non-competing consulting firms...
need to be explored, and expertise needs to be imported from the global environment in which Canada is competing—areas such as the Pacific Rim.

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